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Attribution of victim responsibility in revenge pornography

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Abstract

Purpose: Revenge pornography is a growing risk among adolescents and young adults. Often stemming from sexting, some victims of revenge pornography report experiencing victim-blame similar to that accompanying the reporting of rape. This study explores the assumptions that underlie attributions of victim-blame, with a focus on perpetrator and victim responsibility, as well as gendered assumptions surrounding sexting.

Design: 222 UK university students (111 male, 111 females) read one of two versions of a hypothetical revenge pornography scenario, one involving a male victim of a female perpetrator, the other a female victim of a male perpetrator. They then responded to an open ended question regarding responsibility.

Findings: Qualitative content analysis of these responses identified three inter-related themes: the victim's behaviour, mitigating victim responsibility, and minimising the behaviour.

Social implications: The majority of participants in this study attributed at least some responsibility to the victims of revenge porn depicted in the scenarios. Sex of the victim played a less important role than assumptions around sexting.

Originality/value: The study suggests that victim-blame is linked to the consent implied by sharing intimate images with a partner, but is also mitigated by the normative nature of this relationship practice. There was some evidence that the experience of male victims of revenge pornography is trivialised. These findings have implications for e-safety and victim support.

Attributions of victim responsibility in revenge pornography

Revenge pornography is a form of technologically-facilitated sexual violence that has recently be subsumed by the umbrella term non-consensual pornography (Hall and Hearn, 2017), which refers to a set of practices involving “uploading nude or semi-nude images/videos of a person without their consent” (Bates, 2017, p. 22). This term encompasses a range of practices, including covert acts such as ‘upskirting’ and ‘downblowsing’, surreptitious images or video of someone showering, bathing or having sex, and images ‘hacked’ from victims’ digital devices or cloud storage (Uhl *et al.*, 2018). It also includes the more familiar practice of revenge pornography, whereby images are distributed by former intimate partners, often linked to victims’ social media pages or other identifying information. Henry *et al.* (2017) use the term image-based sexual abuse to highlight the element of control, coercion, and humiliation that these acts often entail. Revenge pornography is now a criminal offence in England and Wales. Police data, however, indicate that only a minority of reported instances are investigated, mainly due to lack of evidence and withdrawal of support by the victim (BBC, 2016).

Like all acts of non-consensual pornography, revenge pornography victimization includes public shame and humiliation, with a recent study showing that images posted on the most popular revenge pornography sites being viewed thousands of times (Uhl *et al.*, 2018). Revenge pornography can have a severe negative impact on victims, in terms of both threat to the victim and mental health (Bates, 2017). Based on in-depth interviews with ‘revenge porn survivors’, Bates (2017) notes similar experiences to victims of rape, including the type of victim-blaming that often accompanies the reporting of rape. The current study explores assumptions that underlie attributions of victim-blame in relation to revenge pornography scenarios.

Typically, the images upon which revenge pornography is based are derived from ‘sexting’, the sending and/or receiving of sexual self-images, or ‘selfies’ via mobile and other digital technologies (Uhl *et al.*, 2018). Sexting is now integrated into adolescents’ and young adults’ courtship rituals (Lippman and Campbell, 2014). A recent study with UK university students found that almost half report taking and sending intimate images to a romantic or prospective partner (Scott and Gavin, 2018). Based on a large scale national survey in Australia, Henry *et*

al. (2017) report even higher rates, with 61% of their younger participants (aged 20 to 29 years) having sent a nude self-image at least once.

While there is nothing in the legal definitions to imply that revenge pornography is a gendered crime (Sweeny, 2019) it is often understood within the framework of norms around gender, sex and sexuality (Hall and Hearn, 2017), particularly in relation to the sexual double standard in which women are judged more harshly than men for engaging in sexual activity. In relation to sexting, women (but not men) who express sexual agency by sharing sexual images are often considered to be less desirable and labelled as 'sluts' (Patella-Ray, 2018). Moreover, the potential and actual risks for male and female sexters are different. For example, women who sext are viewed (by both males and females) as responsible for the consequences of their actions (Ringrose *et al.*, 2013), while similar judgements are not reported in relation to men who sext.

These double standards are reflected in e-safety and anti-sexting campaigns, the majority of which focus on the female victims whose intimate images are distributed by their male recipients. These campaigns generally seek to change the behaviour of female victims rather than male perpetrators (Karaian, 2014), and reflect a form of victim-blaming reminiscent of the ways that women have been held responsible for protecting themselves from other forms of intimate violence such as stalking and rape (Jordan, 2004), which are often understood in terms of normative expectations of masculinity and femininity (Gavin and Scott, 2016; Sleath and Bull, 2010). Such gendered assumptions are the basis of many widely held 'rape myths' which can serve to excuse the actions of the perpetrator and/or blame the victim (Johnson *et al.*, 1997). Within the rape blaming literature, these assumptions can focus on both the character and behavior of the victim (Sleath and Bull, 2010), and similar processes have been found in relation to other forms of intimate violence, such as stalking (Gavin and Scott, 2016). Given that such myths are gendered, victim-blaming can take on different forms for male and female victims. Myths about female victims suggest they provoke victimization through risky behaviours, and that it is women's responsibility for managing these risks. Failure to do so means the victim 'asked for' her victimization (Freedman, 2013). Myths about male victims focus on physical strength, men's proactive sexuality, and the implications of the assault for the victim's 'manhood' (Sleath and Bull, 2010). The overarching assumption of male rape myths is that men cannot be raped, and this serves to both blame the victim, and decrease the perceived severity and impact of the assault (Davies and

McCartney, 2003). Moreover, Sleath and Bull (2010) identified an additional male rape myth which assumes that men enjoy being raped because rape is a form of sex, and men are always ready for and wanting sex. Based on a mock jury study, Gavin and Scott (2016) report similarly gendered assumptions with regards to stalking; male victims of female stalkers were belittled for contacting the police and the perceived impact of the crime minimized, while female victims of male stalkers were blamed for leading on the perpetrator. Whether directed at male or female victims, such myths serve to delegitimize claims of interpersonal violence by questioning aspects of the assault itself, blaming the victim, or absolving the perpetrator.

Victim-blaming is a feature of revenge pornography posts themselves. Hall and Hearn (2017) conducted a discursive analysis of the texts accompanying the images posted on the now defunct 'revenge porn' site *MyEx.com*. They identified three key themes, all linked in some way to victim-blaming, that mitigated posters' responsibility for uploading nude images of their ex-partners. While this and other revenge pornography sites include images of male victims (albeit it to a lesser extent), this study focused only on the text accompanying images of female victims. The extent and form of victim-blaming towards men cannot therefore be ascertained.

In terms of wider public perceptions of revenge pornography, there is a general tendency towards victim-blaming regardless of the sex of the perpetrator and the victim. Two recent revenge pornography scenario studies have examined the relationship between numerous extra-legal factors and perceptions of revenge pornography. Bothamley and Tully (2018) found that, compared to women, men were more likely to blame the victim, and to perceive the situation as less serious in terms of the need for police intervention and potential mental harm to the victim. Extending this, Scott and Gavin (2018) report that these sex differences in perceptions of seriousness occur only in cases involving a male perpetrator and a female victim. The sex of the perpetrator and victim did not influence perceptions of responsibility, although perceptions of victim responsibility were high compared to other forms of intimate violence (e.g., Duff and Scott, 2013).

Although these studies are useful in highlighting high levels of victim-blame, they do not offer insight into the assumptions that underlie these perceptions or the extent to which they reproduce victim-blaming myths surrounding other forms of intimate violence. Henry *et al.*'s (2017) survey included a section asking participants about the extent to which they agreed

with a number of victim-blaming statements and found that 62% agreed “If a person sends a nude or sexual image, then they are at least partly responsible if the image ends up online”. This opinion is possibly supported by the assumption that “People should know better than to take nude selfies in the first place, even if they never send them to anyone”, which was endorsed by 70% of participants.

The current study explores victim-blaming further, through an analysis of open-ended responses to revenge pornography scenarios. The aim is to explore the assumptions that underlie attributions of victim responsibility (i.e., blame), with a focus on perpetrator and victim responsibility, and gendered assumptions surrounding sexting.

Method

Scott and Gavin (2018) conducted a study in which participants read a revenge pornography scenario, and responded to a number of scale items concerning their perceptions of the situation described. The final questions asked participants to indicate the victim’s level of responsibility via a scale item, and to elaborate on why they thought the victim was or was not responsible via an open-ended question. Complete details of the quantitative analyses of all scale items included in the study have already been published (Scott and Gavin, 2018). The current study describes the qualitative analysis of the open-ended question.

Participants

The sample comprised 222 students from a university in the United Kingdom (111 males, 111 females) with an age range of 18 to 22 years, and an average age of 20.03 years ($SD = 1.54$).

Materials

Participants were presented with one of two versions of a hypothetical scenario describing a situation in which a perpetrator non-consensually distributed naked images of an ex-partner after a one-year relationship. In one version the perpetrator was a man and the victim a woman; in the other version the perpetrator was a woman and the victim a man. Other than the sex of the perpetrator and victim, the scenarios were identical. The male perpetrator/female victim version of the scenario is presented below:

Having dated for about a year, Emma (19) and Ben (20) went back to her flat after drinks with friends at the local pub. They were chatting about what turns them on when Ben asked Emma if she had ever taken naked photos of herself. Emma said no, but that it might be fun with someone she trusts. That night they used Ben's phone to take naked photos of each other. Afterwards, Emma thought little more about it and two months later she and Ben broke up. One evening almost a year later, Emma received an email from a male friend saying "Is this you?" together with a link to a website. She clicked on the link which opened a page containing several of the naked photos of her taken on Ben's phone, along with her name and a screenshot of her Facebook profile. The following morning Emma contacted the police.

After reading the scenario, participants were asked to respond to a number of scale items, all measured on 11-point Likert scales. The final scale item asked participants to indicate the extent to which the victim was responsible for the situation, and was followed by an open-ended question: 'Please use the space provided below to elaborate on why you think [victim's name] is or is not responsible for the situation'. In order to avoid leading questions, the words 'victim' and 'perpetrator' were not used in any of these questions, which instead contained the two character's names.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from a range of communal areas around a medium-sized UK university (e.g., library, restaurants, study areas and transportation hubs) at different times of the day. The study took approximately 10 minutes to complete, using pen and paper. Data were entered into SPSS and relevant data subsequently transferred to an Excel spreadsheet for qualitative content analysis. The study received ethics approval in accordance with the ethical requirements of the British Psychological Society.

Data analysis

The data consisted of all responses to the open-ended question regarding victim responsibility. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The stages of analysis were adapted from those outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). The first stage involved reading and re-reading all data to achieve 'immersion' and gain a sense of the whole. Initial coding categories were identified, drawing on prior research and theory related to sexting and revenge pornography, and operational definitions determined. Data were then read closely to

derive codes. During this stage, exact words from the text were highlighted in order to capture key thoughts or concepts. These codes were then collapsed and labelled, and organised into categories to group codes into meaningful clusters. These clusters are akin to themes and subthemes as defined by Braun and Clark (2013), and will be referred to as such throughout the remainder of the analysis. Data were re-examined for each theme to determine whether subthemes were needed. After 25% of the data were analysed in this way, definitions of each theme, subtheme and code were developed, and two coders analysed the remaining data. Throughout the analysis, differences between the male perpetrator /female victim and female perpetrator/male victim scenarios were noted and counted. Finally, each open-ended response was coded for the presence or absence of each theme, subtheme and code, and entered into the Excel spreadsheet containing the full data set. It should be noted, however, that the value of a theme is not necessarily indicated by its frequency, and that important insights can be gleaned from themes regardless of frequency within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

The coding was shared equally by two researchers. To ensure a good level of reliability between the two coders, 30% of responses were coded by both researchers. This process yielded a Cohen's kappa of .85.

Findings

Thematic analysis identified three themes that participants drew upon to justify their attributions of victim responsibility. The first relates to the victim's behaviour, both during and after the relationship with the perpetrator. This theme comprises three inter-related subthemes ('victim consent', 'knowing the risks' and 'minimising the risks'), which together assume that the victim had an element of control over the events depicted in the scenarios. The second theme relates to mitigating victim responsibility, and helps explain why perceived responsibility was only ever partial. It comprises two subthemes ('the normalisation of sexting' and 'a breach of trust'), drawing on shared assumptions around contemporary dating practices. A final, though less dominant theme, relates to minimising the perpetrator's behaviour. This theme was more gender-specific, and comprised two subthemes ('the psycho-ex' and 'trivialising the victim'). On the whole, however, there were few gendered assumptions underlying these themes; they are highlighted only when relevant.

Theme 1: The victim's behaviour

Victim responsibility was attributed, either explicitly or implicitly, in the form of criticisms of the victim for things he or she did or failed to do. There were three key subthemes that highlight ways in which victims of revenge pornography are held responsible in this way: victims consented to intimate photographs; they should have known the risks that this entailed; and they did not take steps to minimise this risk. Often these subthemes occurred together as part of a narrative of responsibility, in which the victim consented to nude photographs then failed to manage the associated risks.

Victim consent. That the victim consented to taking explicit photographs was a central subtheme in attributing full or partial responsibility for the incident depicted in the scenarios, and was the most commonly occurring theme. 55.2% of participants attributed at least some victim responsibility on this basis, explicitly linking consent to responsibility:

Ben is responsible for the situation. If he did not allow Emma to take his naked photo, the issue would not arise (Female participant, male victim)

Other participants were more ambivalent, noting that the victim only consented to taking the photographs, not to publishing them. This theme was invoked by 16.5% of participants, and was attributed to both male (18.6%) and female (14.3%) victims. Despite this caveat, the victims were not entirely absolved of responsibility.

He is kind of responsible because he consented to taking photos with her, but then at the same time he is also not responsible because they weren't intended to be put up on the internet without permission, so it's 50/50. (Male participant, male victim)

Knowing the risks. By consenting to the photographs, the victims were choosing to accept the associated risks, and by extension taking on at least some of the responsibility for the unwanted outcomes. Allowing oneself to be the subject of intimate images was understood as inherently risky, the key risk being that the photographs could be posted online. This subtheme was invoked by 14.3% of participants (16.9% for male and 11.6% for female victims).

Ben is responsible (partly) because he should not let other people take his naked photo in the first place. He should know the consequences if he allowed people to take his naked photo. (Male participant, male victim)

Emma is partly responsible for the situation as she was aware of the risk that taking naked photographs could entail. (Female participant, female victim)

As highlighted in the extract above, participants believed the risks were obvious and that the victim must have known. The most commonly cited risk was that the photographs were stored on someone else's phone.

He is responsible for allowing private/intimate photographs to remain in possession of Emma for her use by letting her keep them on her phone. (Female participant, male victim)

Typically, what these risks entailed was left vague or unspecified. However, in the case of several male victims, the risks were clearly stated. The explicit photographs could be used as revenge in the event of a break-up:

Ben should have thought about how they may break up badly and not have let the pictures be taken on the basis that she may use them against him in the future. (Female participant, male victim)

Although he may trust his partner at the time, the possibility of their breaking up and the images being used against him should have been considered. (Female participant, male victim)

Minimising the risk. Given that the risks were understood as predictable, a common source of victim responsibility derived from the victims' perceived failure to protect themselves. Both male (14.4%) and female victims (11.6%) were culpable in this regard. There were two key ways that victims could have protected themselves. The first, and most common, was to delete the photographs, either straight away or after the relationship ended.

I think that although Emma cannot take full responsibility she is partially responsible as she hadn't (to my knowledge) told him to delete the photos and she should have been very aware that this could have happened in the future. (Female participant, female victim)

Ben should have made sure the photos had been deleted after/before they broke up. (Female participant, male victim)

This subtheme was important in apportioning blame. If the victim asked for the photographs to be deleted, then the *victim* was considered less blameworthy. Conversely, if the victim did not ask for the photographs to be deleted, then the *perpetrator* was considered less blameworthy.

BUT he is [responsible] as he took them and did not ask for them to be deleted when they broke up, if he had asked I'd say he is in no way responsible. (Female participant, male victim)

A second key way in which the victim could have reduced the risk was by explicitly asking the perpetrator not to share the photographs with anyone else.

He did ultimately allow someone to have indecent imagery on a personal device and it does not detail anywhere that he explicitly requested that it was never made public, and did not request that she delete it. (Female participant, male victim)

Indeed, some participants went as far as stating that if the victim did not ask that photographs be kept private, then sharing the photographs online cannot be considered a crime.

By allowing the photos to be taken she opened the possibility. It is not said whether she explicitly asked for the photos to be not shared (although assumed), but if she did not then it is certainly not a crime. (Male participant, female victim)

Theme 2: Mitigating victim responsibility

It is important to note that not all participants held the victim responsible for their fate.

Indeed, 15.8% made it clear that the victim was in no way responsible (14.2% for male and 17.5% for female victims). In each case, this theme was expressed in tandem with one of two subthemes: the normality of sexting and trust in relationships.

The normalisation of sexting. For some participants, taking explicit self-photographs was understood as a normal part of a romantic relationship, and applied to both male (15.4%) and female (19.7%) victims.

I don't think that Emma is in the wrong. It's normal for people in relationships to take those kind of pictures. (Male participant, female victim)

Ben took the photos but it's sort of normal when dating someone. (Female participant, male victim)

A breach of trust. The normalisation of taking naked photographs with a partner was often related to, and invoked in conjunction with, a subtheme surrounding trust and betrayal. This subtheme was equally likely to be invoked in relation to male (15.4%) and female (14.8%) victims.

What they did was normal. All couples do it. She shouldn't have published them though. She broke his trust. But he shouldn't have rung the police. (Female participant, male victim)

He didn't do anything wrong - the picture taking is totally normal in a relationship, especially after a year together - what she did wasn't a crime but she broke his trust completely and that is terrible - she's an absolute biatch for doing it. (Male participant, male victim)

From this point of view, the perpetrator was perceived to have broken the victim's trust. It was assumed that taking intimate photographs with a partner involves an implicit, or unspoken, agreement that the photographs would not be shared.

He obviously let her take the photos so he must have been aware of the risk. However upon taking the photos there would have been an almost unspoken rule that these photos would remain private, even after a break up and therefore Ben would have been confident that his photos wouldn't be leaked. (Male participant, female victim)

It was the betrayal of trust that evoked the strongest response from participants, and was constituted as the most problematic aspect of uploading the photographs:

Emma obviously abused this trust and should be punished accordingly. (Female participant, male victim)

He must have known how much this would effect on a personal and a social level - such a thing can destroy a girl's reputation. He also broke her trust, which is just as bad almost on a personal level. He's 90% responsible. (Male participant, female victim)

For many, this breach of trust constituted the 'real crime'. As the comments below indicate, the word 'crime' is used figuratively rather than literally; it places the blame squarely on the

perpetrator, but does not necessarily imply that there was a criminal offense worthy of police intervention.

Bitchy but doesn't need police to get involved - problem is she broke his trust and that's the crime. (Male participant, male victim)

Both responsible for the taking of the pictures. She's responsible for uploading them - crime because broke his trust, don't need to get the police involved though.

Distressing because broke his trust. (Female participant, male victim)

Theme 3: Minimising the behaviour

A less dominant, but theoretically important theme shaping understandings of these scenarios involved trivialising the events depicted. This was achieved via two inter-related subthemes that partially mitigated the perpetrator's responsibility whilst trivialising the impact on the victim.

The psycho ex. This subtheme applied to male victims (12.7%) rather than female victims (0.9%), and with the exception of one female, was invoked only by male participants.

She's a psycho girlfriend - probably why he broke up with her. (Male participant, male victim)

She broke his trust - typical psycho ex. (Male participant, male victim)

However, whenever the female perpetrator was labelled as 'psycho', the assertion was accompanied by statements to the effect that her actions did *not* warrant police intervention:

Needs medical help not police. (Male participant, male victim)

Constructed as 'psycho', the female perpetrator was in need of help and support, rather than police intervention. This served not only to absolve the female perpetrator of responsibility, but also to minimise the perceived severity of her actions. This was reinforced by a second subtheme that served to trivialise the impact on the (male) victim.

Trivialising the victim. A small number of participants (3.6%) claimed that the male victim, rather than experiencing distress, should instead be flattered by becoming the victim of revenge pornography.

Probably just some crazy bitch. He must be quite fit for her to publish them online so should take it as a compliment. (Male participant, male victim)

He did it so to some extent he's responsible. But good for his ego - must find him really attractive. She's mental though. (Male participant, male victim)

Whilst the female perpetrator was discussed in very negative terms and constituted as having diminished mental capacity, her actions were nonetheless constructed as potentially flattering, as a boost to the male victim's ego. Together, these two gendered assumptions (that the female perpetrator was 'psycho', and the male victim should be flattered) minimised the perceived psychological impact on the male victim, and reduced the likelihood of the female perpetrator's actions constituting a crime.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore assumptions underlying attributions of victim responsibility (i.e., blame) in relation to revenge pornography. The focus was on understandings of perpetrator and victim responsibility, and gendered assumptions surrounding the sharing of intimate self-images in the context of a romantic relationship.

Participants attributed at least partial responsibility to the victim of revenge pornography depicted in the scenario, usually in the form of criticisms of the victim's behaviour both during and after the relationship. These criticisms centred around sexting and the management of the images produced and shared during the relationship. Consent was central in attributing blame to the victim: victims consented to taking nude self-images with their partner, they should have known the risks, and they should have taken steps to minimise these risks. Indeed, over half of participants directly linked victim consent to victim responsibility. In taking and sharing the photographs, they accepted the risks; specifically, the risk that they would be shared. Therefore, the victim could have prevented the situation from occurring. This could have been achieved in three ways: by not consenting to the taking of nude images with their partner, by asking for them to be deleted (either during or after the relationship), or by making it clear to their partner that consented to the taking and sharing intimate images did not mean they were also consenting to their distribution. This last point is particularly interesting in that it contradicts another important subtheme; the implicit agreement that nude self-images shared within the context of a romantic relationship will not

be shared beyond the relationship. Our findings indicate that attributions of victim responsibility, in part rest on whether victims explicitly voiced this ‘unspoken’ agreement or not.

Our findings are consistent with the victim-blaming attitudes endorsed by Henry *et al.*’s (2017) participants; namely, that victims of revenge pornography should have known better than to take nude self-images and are at least partially responsible if those images end up online. We extend this by identifying other sets of assumptions surrounding the apportioning of blame; that is, the level of responsibility attributed to the victim.

Victim responsibility, however, was only ever partial. It was mitigated by the unspoken rules around sexting within an ongoing (romantic) relationship. Firstly, sexting is considered a normal and expected practice within heterosexual romantic relationships. This is consistent with research with the same population, which showed that almost half report sexting nude self-images to romantic partners at least once (Scott and Gavin, 2018). Secondly, there is an implied understanding that these images will not be shared. Paradoxically, our findings indicate that partners should expect this contract to be breached in the event of a break-up. Indeed, it is remiss of sexters not to anticipate this breach of trust at the time the photographs are taken and shared with their partners. They should expect the worst. Failing to take defensive actions to prevent these images being distributed renders the victims of revenge pornography at least partially responsible for their fate.

That victim responsibility is mitigated by the understanding that sexting is a normal part of romantic relationships is consistent with research on other forms of intimate violence. Based on the qualitative analyses of mock-jury deliberations of stalking scenarios, researchers report that the perceived responsibility of those engaging in stalking behaviour is mitigated if that behaviour is understood as reasonable in the context of heterosexual courtship and break-up (Gavin and Scott, 2016; Scott *et al.*, 2014). The current study indicates that this logic can also apply to victim responsibility in cases of revenge pornography.

Gender played almost no role in attributions of victim responsibility, with the exception the final theme, which served to minimise perceptions of female perpetrator responsibility and male victim distress. Quantitative analysis of responses to the same scenarios used here showed that men are less likely to perceive the situation as serious when it involves a male

victim of a female perpetrator (Scott and Gavin, 2018). This attitude is reflected in the qualitative responses, but is expressed by both male and female participants. Despite the high levels of perceived distress for both male and female victims of revenge pornography (Scott and Gavin, 2018), some participants stated that male victims should feel flattered. This is consistent with previous research indicating that intimate self-images of men's bodies are often praised and respected as affirmations of their masculinity and sexual ability (Patella-Ray, 2018; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015). This understanding, however, served to minimise perceived harm to male victims of revenge pornography as well as the need for police intervention in cases of male revenge pornography victimisation. Moreover, it is strikingly similar to assumptions surrounding male victims of stalking, which pathologised the female perpetrator while belittling the male victim, whose actions in contacting the police were considered gender-inappropriate (Gavin and Scott, 2016). It also reproduces the male rape myth identified by Sleath and Bull (2010), which assumes men should enjoy any sort of sexual attention from a woman, thereby questioning the legitimacy and impact of male sexual assault. This trend could have important implications for male victims seeking support or police intervention for revenge pornography and other acts of intimate violence, and warrants further investigation.

The current study found little evidence of the sexual double standard identified in previous research on sexting and revenge pornography (Patella-Ray, 2018; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015). Responses to the scenarios in the current study included some related understandings, but without the gendered assumptions underlying this phenomenon. For example, Ringrose and Harvey (2015) identified a heteronormative discourse of 'boys will be boys' running through both sext education films and young people's talk about sexting. Among other things, this discourse constructs men as inherently untrustworthy, which creates an imperative for women to expect a breach of trust with regard to sexting and simultaneously justifies men's behaviour in breaching that trust. The same logic was applied to the perpetrators and victims of revenge pornography in the current study, but was not gendered; both men and women who sext within a relationship should expect a breach of trust, albeit after the relationship has ended. It should be noted that the characters in the scenarios used here were in their early 20s, rather than the teenagers featured in sext education campaigns or Ringrose and Harvey's focus groups.

This study investigated attributions of responsibility in cases of revenge pornography. As expected, shared norms around sexting were key themes in shaping understandings of revenge pornography victimisation. In this regard, victim-control over intimate self-images played a greater role than gendered assumptions around sexting. Communication between partners who sext emerged as an important factor in perceptions of revenge pornography victimisation, and warrants further investigation, both in terms of reducing the likelihood of sexted images being shared beyond the intended recipient and support for revenge pornography victims. Given the role that consent played in attributions of responsibility, it is important to explore perceptions of other forms of non-consensual pornography, particularly those based on more surreptitiously obtained images, such as upskirting or hidden camera videos. As sexting is increasingly understood as a normative practice in romantic relationships, the ways that young people negotiate the contradictions surrounding trust, intimacy and sexted images need further investigation to inform sex-education, victim-support and legal understandings of the increasing range of non-consensual pornography and image-based sexual abuse.

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